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VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR WOMEN

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POPULAR discussions of industrial training are rendered difficult by the fact that the subject has as yet no fixed vocabulary. Professional training, vocational training, industrial training, manual training, are often used interchangeably. We shall use the phrase "vocational training," and shall understand it to include such education as aims to secure efficiency in the occupation followed for self-maintenance, whether such occupation be the merest task or the complex administration of a business or a profession.

It is evident that such training involves education for general intelligence, as well as technical training with a specific end in view. It is also clear that the training may be brief and elementary if the task is simple; the trade school, or apprenticeship, or even the brief course of lessons given by another worker may suffice where the work calls for little skill and involves little variety. As the task grows in difficulty, requiring application of principles, demanding judgment, broad experience, ability to deal with and to direct others, the training must be proportionately increased. The demand for general intelligence also grows correspondingly.

The instrument for vocational training, then, may be the shop, in which knowledge of the art is handed along from one worker to another through simple apprenticeship; or the trade school, in which a brief course of instruction is given, with emphasis upon technical details and swiftness of accomplishment; or the technical college, which provides longer courses of instruction, combining academic and technical programs, alternating the lecture room with the shop; or actual apprenticeship in business; or professional training, superadded to the ordinary program afforded by school and college.

Is vocational training necessary for women? As a matter

of fact, women are already in trades and professions. For years they have been filling our factories, stores, offices and schools. We have made public provision for the preparation of teachers, and many states likewise train women for the practice of medicine. Hospitals have provided training schools for nurses. In these fields some provision has been made for the appropriate education of women for their work. Enough experience has been accumulated to show that training for the vocation is always beneficial, and usually essential.

The ordinary woman, however, has little specific training for the most important work which she has to do in the world. It is left to her mother alone to teach her how to maintain her home and to meet the needs of her children. If the mother is ignorant, the daughter is untaught, and a long train of evils follows in consequence. As this matter concerns the general welfare the evils should be prevented, if possible, by general education.

It is generally conceded that in preparing a girl for her work we have to consider two vocations as probable or possible:—first, maintenance of the home, with the care and rearing of children; second, the vocation by which self-maintenance may be assured in the period before she becomes a homemaker, or during the time when she is obliged to support herself and her children. Since the first or major vocation is essential to the general welfare it must always be linked with the second or minor vocation.. Therefore no work for woman can be urged or defended which tends to lessen her efficiency in her major occupation.

Yet at this point we neither think nor speak clearly. Vocational training for women would be less complex if their economic contribution as homemakers were fairly considered. A woman is said to “earn her living” only when she works outside her own home, receiving money for her work. The moment her wage-earning power is transferred to her home she is supposed to be dependent upon father or husband, no matter how great the compensating service which she renders. A teacher earning twelve hundred dollars a year resigns her position, marries, cares for home, husband and children, transferring

her income-earning power to the duties required in the service of the household. Is she not still self-supporting,—more than self-supporting? Out of the family income, through her ability, knowledge and skill, she is enabled to save a fair margin. If the family were bereft of her contribution the margin would be quickly swallowed by wages paid to housekeeper, nurse, seamstress, cook and others, who together fail to fill her place. Many a family becomes a public charge when the mother dies. If it were possible to fix according to some scale the economic value of woman's contribution in the home, it would immediately be evident that the training which makes her a better and more efficient homemaker is of direct economic advantage to the community. Vagueness of preparation would probably disappear with clearer understanding of the relation of her work to the public good.

One of the first principles of vocational training for women, then, is that such training should insure greater ability, judgment and skill in the major vocation, thus securing the intelligent maintenance of the home. The second principle, or corollary, is that the minor vocation should be so conducted as not to interfere with the fulfilment of the first or major task.

The need of vocational training for women presses most heavily where self-support is imperative in early years. Discussion of the subject may be clouded by the fact that the obvious need varies widely—according to the opportunity and environment of the group under discussion. For the sake of clearness, then, we will consider three groups. In the first group we count the young girls who are forced to leave school at the earliest possible or permitted age in order to engage in some specific occupation for self-support or to assist in the support of the family. In this large company we find most of the daughters of recent immigrants, as well as many other girls whose families have very limited means, or who have suffered stress through illness or other unusual hardship. The farm, the factory, the office, the store, are already employing these girls in large numbers, unskilled in the beginning and often, except as to some small task, unskilled in the end.

Should such girls be deprived of the essential instruction for-

merly accredited to the home, and go from their years of employment to their future homes as ignorantly as they entered upon their daily task in the shop? Are they in any sense fitted for the larger responsibility which the major vocation brings? Are their years of trade experience made profitable by wise choice and fair preparation, or do they encounter by chance the immediate demand of some trade, using them for its advantage as part of a machine demanding swiftness and dexterity in a single operation, repeated countless times, and considering the salability of the product and not the welfare of the young worker?

If such conditions exist—and we know that they do—these girls should be as far as possible protected by suitable education in advance, which should develop skill and judgment, acquaint them in some measure with fair trade conditions, make choice of occupation to some degree possible, and safeguard their health and the interests of their future homes. Concerning the need of such trade training there is now little disagreement—the fact is generally conceded. The main question is whether it should be supplied at public expense, and by what means. Private philanthropy, by intelligent and generous experiment, has paved the way.

The second group to be considered may roughly include the girls whose entrance upon gainful occupations is longer delayed, but who must as a matter of course look forward to self-maintenance. These girls avail themselves of the opportunities afforded by the ordinary program of the graded schools, and may or may not add some portion or all of the high-school course. They have had a more generous inheritance than the first group. Their homes are usually better endowed, or they may be the younger sisters of members of the first group. Their need is less pressing—but by no means less real. The school should test, and if need be, supplement their preparation for the responsibilities centering upon the home. It should also make them to some degree technically ready for a wholesome occupation, affording a living wage. Otherwise they too are at the mercy of trade conditions, earning a scant income at an employment selected by chance.

To the third group will be assigned all women whose opportunities of education exceed high-school training. For them vocational preparation may be assigned to the college period or may possibly follow it.

It is often assumed that academic training in itself gives technical skill, that the young woman who graduates from college is thereby prepared for any task which may confront her. This is a misconception of the function of the college. If it does its work well, a good foundation is laid, certain aptitudes and habits of thought are developed, which should make progress in any art or craft more rapid, and judgment more intelligent. On the other hand, long years given to purely academic work, away from the normal conditions of the working world, permit certain powers to lie dormant. Students are trained to deliberation rather than to action. The college woman may need adjustment to the conditions of the shop, the office, or even the school. Training which presupposes the task and keeps it in mind certainly advances the general preparation of any student for her work. If we acquaint her with the immediate problems of the task the necessary period of apprenticeship is shortened and rapid advancement assured. Such training seems reasonable. Why should the education of the girl lie completely outside her work in the world? Why should so deep a gulf be fixed between the school and the later task?

The vocational aim need not diminish the so-called cultural value of a subject. Need the study of bacteriology become less "broadening" because the nurse-to-be recognizes its relation to her future work, knowing that she is to apply its truths in sanitation and disinfection, in antiseptic precautions, in securing surgical cleanliness? Is the "social worker" of tomorrow a less intelligent student of economics to-day because she is conscious of the problem with which she personally is to deal? On the other hand, is a girl more liberally educated because for four "finishing" years of her education her program of studies tacitly ignores all reference to the sacred responsibility which she is so soon to assume—or which she must help others to meet? Rather, is not the whole course of study enlightened and informed by

recognition of the goal and by conscious endeavor to reach it? If this be true, education which includes vocational training is far more liberal than that which ignores or excludes it.

It seems to the writer that the trend of educational thought is in this direction. The college woman as well as her less favored sister must be trained, "not simply to be good, but to be good for something", not simply to be wise, but to be fully and definitely prepared for service;—and this conception is perhaps the most important contribution of higher education to the advancement of vocational training. Remote as it may seem, it nevertheless influences the general ideal. We cannot expect the average parent to take pains to insure in his daughter's education the thing which the college despises.

If we accept the proposition that the maintenance of the home is woman's major vocation, all women are included in the group for whom vocational training is essential. The responsibility of providing such instruction is divided between home and school. Exactly as practise under shop conditions is essential for complete industrial training, so practise in a home with wise guidance under normal conditions is indispensable to the best preparation for maintaining a home. Girls who are so fortunate as to live in homes where this instruction is afforded are therefore least in need of supplemental instruction in the public school or other instruction provided for the purpose. The girl who is most in need of industrial training for self maintenance is also likely to be in greatest need of training for home-keeping. Unless she is taught better she will perpetuate the same type of home from which she has sprung, and this in itself is a menace to the community. There is, then, a double reason for providing adequate training in home matters for girls in the more favored homes. Out of their abundance they must help lift the standard of those who are less favored. Home training, however, must be supplemented by general school instruction which approves the higher standard of living, and shows its relation to the community. It is to the advantage of both these groups that standards of right living should be set forth in the schools and approved by them.

It follows that the largest possible influence is inherent in the

position of the college woman whose training leads her to recognize the relation of the home to the community, who fits herself to assume her own responsibilities intelligently, and who uses her influence in lifting the standard of the homes which have been less intelligently administered. The college has an indispensable part to play in the development of vocational training. As soon as the college for women incorporates into its accepted program courses which will assist in conscious preparation for the maintenance of the home, the standard of living throughout the country will feel its beneficent influence.

The vocational aim being openly and generally accepted, the public schools will provide for appropriate training. This will include: 1. Provision of courses tending toward intelligent home administration in all programs outlined for women and girls. 2. Some means of testing proficiency in these arts and principles, however acquired, so that at least a minimum amount of preparation will be exacted of all girls. 3. The establishment of centers where household administration can be taught by example and practise as well as by precept. By means of supplementary vacation schools, evening schools and continuation schools, housekeepers, young mothers and others in need of specific instruction may receive the necessary help exactly as the plumber may now reinforce his knowledge through a course in an evening school.

The agencies thus far enumerated will provide the elementary instruction immediately required. Such instruction, however, will not be possible unless suitable teachers are provided, and these must naturally be women of large opportunity and experience. This presupposes higher courses in technical schools or colleges which consider the problem in the large and train teachers and workers for leadership. Again it becomes clear that the college should establish proper technical courses.

The need of three agencies for vocational training is apparent: for the immediate need of the young beginner, the trade school; for the middle group, the technical high school; for the leader, the technical college.

The trade school and the vocational center meet the immediate need of the young worker. Exactly as the girl from the

poor and meager home must depend upon intelligent instruction to raise her standard of living, so her judgment and skill must be reinforced when she confronts the problem of self-maintenance. She is pushed by necessity into the ranks of wage-earners, knowing nothing of the field she is entering, and she must make the best terms she can with those who take advantage of her ignorance. As an unskilled worker she must follow the crowd and take what she can get. General schooling has left the hand unskilled and the judgment untrained. She has neither knowledge of her own ability, nor the immediate advantage of a known employment. She is entitled to instruction which considers not trade profit alone but the advantage of the worker, which makes possible intelligent choice of the best course available and shortens the period of unpaid apprenticeship. In short, the education which she sorely needs as she faces self-maintenance is specific preparation for wage earning and the conditions involved in it.

Two conditions are essential to this training: first, a thread of manual vocational work throughout the ordinary school program for all girls, to train hand and eye and develop taste and judgment along practical lines; second, special schools for industrial training, with brief, intensive courses, to which girls may be sent for a preparatory period when facing the necessity of self-maintenance, the minimum requirement of general training having been covered in the ordinary school. These centers of industrial or trade training should be separate from the academic centers and should supply as far as possible the conditions of apprenticeship. They should be free from the fixed classifications and grades of the school, and should afford illustrations and types of vocational experience. To such public provision as may be made for such centers, private philanthropy will for a long while bring its aid, for vocational training must be tied to individual conditions and must ask for coöperation from manufacturer and employer. Supervised apprenticeship in chosen places of work will for a time take the place of organized training schools, as for example, in the case of the hospital dietetician, the house decorator, and the photographer. But elementary courses, requiring accuracy, speed, and an ordinary de-

gree of skill, may even now be provided by the school. The seamstress, the machine operator, the saleswoman, the typewriter, the clerk, the bookkeeper may be trained in such centers.

The technical high school meets the needs of the second group by providing courses which develop manual dexterity, and acquaint the student with the outlines of some practical employment. Notable examples of such schools in New England are the technical high schools of Newton, Springfield, and Boston. In these schools the academic requirement is lessened and courses are arranged in sewing, dressmaking, millinery, cooking, laundry work, household decoration, and sanitation, with ample training in commercial subjects and preparation for clerical work, including stenography, typewriting and bookkeeping. So far as possible the school product is expected to be of service just like the ordinary commercial product. In one school the girls prepare the luncheons which are served to instructors and classes. In another the garments made are sold to cover the cost of material. These schools provide adequate instruction in household arts and at the same time pave the way for a useful vocation. The numbers that flock to them testify to the demand for such training, and many girls who otherwise would have withdrawn at the end of the grammar-school course are glad to remain and profit by the practical opportunity thus afforded. Already the effect of the instruction is shown in increased wage-earning power. Those who have followed the movement are equally sure that the individual homes profit by the vocational training.

An interesting example of the technical college is afforded by the recent development of Simmons College in Boston. This college was endowed by its founder, John Simmons, as an institution through whose offices women might be prepared for self-maintenance through appropriate training in art, science and industry. The trustees to whom the gift was confided made a careful study of the problem of education for self-maintenance, and eight years ago the college opened its doors. It provided courses of training for high school graduates, the programs in every case assuring technical instruction for certain fields of work, with the related academic training necessitated by the task. The work attempted is indicated by the various depart-

ments—household economics, library training, secretarial training, training in science (including preparation for nursing and for the study of medicine), and training for social service. The regular programs cover four years.

One hundred and twenty-five students appeared the first year; in the fifth, the college numbered over six hundred. The demand for its graduates has been constant. The register of graduates indicates this demand and shows the variety of positions for which the students have been technically trained and which they are now acceptably filling. The range of compensation exceeds that of the average college graduate, and in some fields is far above it. This is particularly true where executive ability, creative imagination, and the power of directing others are essential. In such positions technical training shows its worth.

The work of the secretary illustrates the need of technical training. The young woman who enters the course arranged for the secretarial school knows in advance something of the scope and character of the duties awaiting her. She knows that she must possess technical skill, that she must become an accurate and expert stenographer and typewriter, must understand accounts, must be able to file letters and find them after they have been filed, must transcribe dictation whatever the vocabulary involved, and must be familiar with business methods. She cannot follow the prescribed technical courses without becoming familiar with the personal requirements as well,—dignity, reserve, professional honor, promptness, patience, courtesy, adherence to contract, responsibility for service. All these are clearly set forth in the preparation of the secretary. This technical preparation is added to academic training, including English, modern languages, certain courses in science, economics, psychology and ethics, as in the ordinary college. At the end of the course the student is technically prepared for a position as college registrar, secretary to president or professor, to author or publisher, to lawyer or physician. She soon becomes capable of research or of executive organization. She commands from the beginning a better compensation than the apprentice could possibly receive. Already experience has shown the economic value of the training. Similar experience has proved

the wisdom of vocational courses outlined for managers of institutions, for dieteticians in hospitals, for stewards, for directors of lunchrooms, for visitors to the poor, for librarians, nurses and social workers.

“What is my work to be? How can I prepare myself to do it successfully and through it to minister to human need?” These are the questions which the student is constantly asking as she confronts her task. The very presence and recognition of the task give point to the preparation and prevent it from being a mere course of training for one’s own sake.

Conference with parents as well as with students shows the origin of the demand for vocational training in colleges. The assured expectation of self-maintenance; the desire to be prepared for self-maintenance, should necessity arise; the recognition of the necessity of preparation for home responsibilities; the demand for executive experts with an understanding of industrial conditions; the dearth of workers properly trained for their task; the taste and liking for practical affairs; the desire to be of definite service in the world—all these are factors in the student’s demand for vocational training. The woman with one talent emerges from the course prepared to perform some one task well and glad to meet its demands. It is a privilege and not a burden to be shirked. The ten-talent woman goes out with the power to modify circumstances, to improve conditions, to direct enterprises, to assume executive control. In either case the vocational aim is essential.

Already trade schools, technical high schools and technical colleges are answering the demand for vocational training, and proving the existence of the need. Public opinion asks that woman be trained for her work. The one thing needful is that the school, as a public servant, shall come to recognize its true relation to this economic problem.